Socrates of Constantinople

(c.a. 380 – c. 439)

BRIEFING

Socrates of Constantinople (c. 380 – after 439), also known as Socrates Scholasticus (Ancient Greek: Σωκράτης ὁ Σχολαστικός), was a 5th-century Greek Christian church historian, a contemporary of Sozomen and Theodoret.

He is the author of a Historia Ecclesiastica ("Church History", Ἐκκλησιαστική Ἱστορία) which covers the history of late ancient Christianity during the years 305 to 439.

LIFE

He was born in Constantinople. Even in ancient times, nothing seems to have been known of his life except what can be gathered from notices in his Historia Ecclesiastica, which departed from its ostensible model, Eusebius of Caesarea, in emphasizing the place of the emperor in church affairs and in giving secular as well as church history.

Socrates' teachers, noted in his prefaces, were the grammarians Helladius and Ammonius, who came to Constantinople from Alexandria, where in 391 they had been involved in a violent revolt that culminated in the destruction of the Serapeum of Alexandria.

It is not proved that Socrates of Constantinople later profited from the teachings of the sophist Troilus. No certainty exists as to Socrates' precise vocation, though it may be inferred from his work that he was a layman.

In later years, he traveled and visited, among other places, Paphlagonia and Cyprus.

The history covers the years 305 to 439, and experts believe it was finished in 439 or soon thereafter, and certainly during the lifetime of Emperor Theodosius II, i.e., before 450. The purpose of the history is to continue the work of Eusebius of Caesarea (1.1). It relates in simple Greek language what the Church experienced from the days of Constantine to the writer's time. Ecclesiastical dissensions occupy the foreground, for when the Church is at peace, there is nothing for the church historian to relate (7.48.7). In the preface to Book 5, Socrates defends dealing with Arianism and with political events in addition to writing about the church.

Socrates' account is in many respects well-balanced. He is careful not to use hyperbolic titles when referring to prominent personalities in the church and the government and he even criticizes Eusebius for his excessive praises to Emperor Constantine the Great in his Vita Constantini.

HELLADIUS THE GRAMMARIAN

Helladius (Greek: Ἑλλάδιος) was a Byzantine period grammarian, professor, and a priest of Zeus during the 4th and 5th centuries.

Helladius was a professor of some distinction in Alexandria. In 391, he was involved in a violent revolt centred at the Serapeum, where the pagan rebels tortured and killed captured Christians, with Helladius reportedly personally killing nine Christians. After the suppression of the revolt and the destruction of the temple, Helladius fled to Constantinople.

By the reign of Theodosius II (408–450 A.D.), he was back to actively teaching grammar. Socrates of Constantinople in his youth was one of his pupils. Helladius was granted comitiva ordinis primi by this emperor in 425 A.D., by virtue of which he became ranked among the *ex vicarii*.

Helladius compiled a Greek lexicon entitled λεξικὸν κατὰ στοιχεῖου or τῶν λέξεων συλλογή according to Photius; elsewhere it is stated the lexicon bore the title λέξεως παντοίας χρῆσις κατα στοῖχειον. Helladius was one of the important sources used by the *Suda* as well.

AMMONIUS GRAMMATICUS

Ammonius Grammaticus (/əˈmoʊniəs/; Ancient Greek: Ἀμμώνιος Γραμματικός; fl. 391) was a 4th-century Egyptian priest.

In 391, he was involved in a violent revolt centred at Alexandria's Serapeum, where the pagan rebels tortured and killed captured Christians. After the suppression of the revolt and the destruction of the temple, Ammonius fled to Constantinople, where he became the tutor of the ecclesiastical historian Socrates.

Ammonius was formerly identified as the author of a treatise titled *Peri homoíōn kai diaphórōn léxeōn* (περὶ ὁμοίων καὶ διαφόρων λέξεων, *On the Differences of Synonymous Expressions*). But it seems more probable that the real author was Herennius Philo of Byblus, who was born during the reign of Nero and lived till the reign of Hadrian, and that the treatise in its present form is a revision prepared by a later Byzantine editor, whose name may have been Ammonius.

THE HISTORIA ECCLESIASTICA

The Historia Ecclesiastica is one of the few sources of information about Hypatia, the female mathematician and philosopher of Alexandria, who was brutally murdered by a mob, allegedly by order of Patriarch Cyril of Alexandria. Socrates presents Hypatia's murder as entirely politically motivated and makes no mention of any role that Hypatia's neoplatonism might have played in her death, arguing instead that she was killed for supporting local prefect Orestes in his political struggle against Cyril. Socrates unequivocally condemns the actions of the mob, declaring, "Surely nothing can be farther from the spirit of Christianity than the allowance of massacres, fights, and transactions of that sort."

Socrates is often assumed to have been a follower of Novatianism, but this is based on the fact that he gives a lot of details about the Novatianists, and speaks of them in generous terms, as he does of Arians and other groups. He speaks of himself as belonging to the church.

Socrates asserts that he owed the impulse to write his work to a certain Theodorus, who is alluded to in the proemium to the second book as "a holy man of God" and seems therefore to have been a monk or one of the higher clergy. The contemporary historians Sozomen and Theodoret were combined with Socrates in a sixth-century compilation, which has obscured their differences until recently, when their individual portrayals of the series of Christian emperors were distinguished one from another and contrasted by Hartmut Leppin, Von Constantin dem Großen zu Theodosius II (Göttingen 1996).

Editions and translations

The Historia Ecclesiastica was first edited in Greek by Robert Estienne, on the basis of Codex Regius 1443 (Paris, 1544); a translation into Latin by Johannes Christophorson (1612) is important for its variant readings. The fundamental early modern edition, however, was produced by Henricus Valesius (Henri Valois) (Paris, 1668), who used the Codex Regius, a Codex Vaticanus, and a Codex Florentinus, and also employed the indirect tradition of Theodorus Lector (Codex Leonis Alladi).

The text was edited in Patrologia Graeca vol. 67 (online at documentacatholicaomnia.eu). The new critical edition of the text is edited by G. C. Hansen, and published in the series Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1995). An English translation by A. C. Zenos was published in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. 2. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wallace. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1890) (online editions: newadvent.org ccel.orgmunseys.com. More recently (2004-2007), Socrates' History has been published in four bilingual (Greek/Latin and French) volumes by Pierre Maraval in the Sources Chrétiennes collection.